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Amr Ibn Al-As Mosque: Expansions and Reforms Over the Centuries and the Current Layout

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Eman is a writer and an engineer. She loves to write about old mosques in Egypt.

The Mosque of Amr Ibn Al-As, Cairo

The Mosque of Amr Ibn Al-As is the first mosque built in Egypt and Africa in 642 AD after the Arab-Islamic conquest of Egypt in 641 AD, led by Commander Amr Ibn Al-As.

After Amr Ibn al-As ended the rule of the Romans to Egypt. The Copts praised him as a liberator for saving them from Roman persecution in the late Roman rule of Egypt.

By order of Caliph Umar Ibn Al-Khattab, Amr Ibn al-Aas built Al Fustat, which became the capital of Egypt instead of the ancient capital of Alexandria, which was the capital of Egypt during the Roman era. Thus, Al Fustat was the first Islamic capital in Africa.

Amr Ibn Al-As built the mosque in the center of Al Fustat. The mosque of Amr Ibn al-As was known by several names, including the old mosque and the crown of the mosques.

The Location of the Mosque

The Location and the First Structure

Commander Amr ibn al-As built the mosque on the eastern bank of the Nile, about 100 meters south of Babylon Fortress. The Mosque of Amr was located directly on the Nile when it was built, but the course of the Nile gradually moved towards the West until it became what it is now.

The Mosque of Amr was built in the style of the oldest and most important architectural method of building mosques, the Holy Prophet Mohammad's Mosque. Also, Amr ibn al-As built his house on the east side of the wall of the mosque and left a pathway about four meters wide, similar to the Prophet's Mosque and his house in Medina.

The original design of the mosque was 29 meters long and 17 meters wide. It was a low shed with pillars made of palm tree trunks, stones, and bricks, covered with a wooden roof and palm leaves. The floor was of gravel. Four columns were used to refer to the direction of Kaaba in Mecca and inserted on the qibla wall; It was large enough to offer an area for the prayers. The mosque had no adornment, and there were no courtyards, niches, or minarets. The mosque remained until 672 AD.

The Current layout of Amr Ibn Al-Aas Mosque

The Current Layout

The present mosque area is 120 meters by 110 meters, which is after its expansion through the centuries.

The current mosque does not include anything from the old mosque built by Amr other than the area of the land on which it was built; This area is located in the eastern of the Qibla Riwaq (arcade).

The layout of the mosque consists of the main entrance on the western side of the mosque, which consists of a large open courtyard surrounded by four arcades (Riwaq) with simple wooden ceilings. The largest of these is the Qibla Riwaq containing two prayer niches (Mihrab), each with a wooden pulpit (Minbar). The wall of the qibla has two paintings dating back to the Mamluk era.

There is a dome in the north-eastern corner of the Qibla Riwaq, dating back to Abdullah bin Amr ibn al-As.

Amr Ibn Al-As Mosque

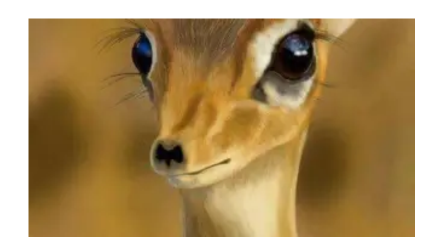
The large open courtyard (Sahn) of the mosque includes a dome built on eight round marble columns.

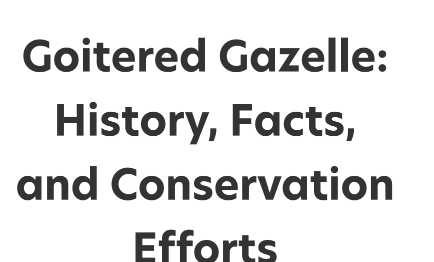
Some arched windows of the old mosque are decorated with frescoes whose remains are still found in the southern wall.

A few transverse wooden supports above the columns, these wooden supports often have delightful decorations based on the use of floral motifs in the form of grape leaves.

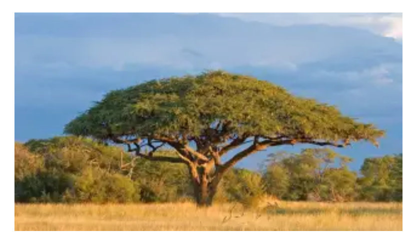
One of the minarets of the mosque is dating back to the Murad Bey era, a simple minaret with a conical top.

The Mosque of Amr Ibn Al-As

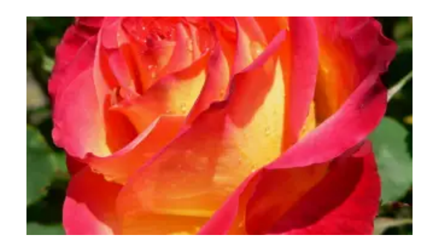




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The Basic Expansions and Reforms of the Mosque through Centuries

In 673 AD, Maslama ibn Mukhallad al-Ansari extended the mosque. This extension has been extended mainly on the north side, adding more space to the prayer hall as well as the courtyard. Four minarets were built, one at each corner of the mosque.

In 698 AD, Caliph Abd al-Aziz ibn Marwan extended the mosque west and north to double the original size four times.

In 707 AD, Abdullah Ibn Abdul Malik raised the roof of the mosque. During 710 AD, the ruler Qurra Ibn Shareek demolished the mosque and rebuilt it. In 750 AD, Salah Ibn Ali added four more passages to the mosque. During 791 AD, Musa bin Isa extended the back of the mosque.

In 827 AD, Abdallah ibn Tahir al-Khurasani extended the mosque to a large extent. This was the last expansion phase that gives the mosque its current borders. The fire consumed much of the mosque during 888 AD but it was restored by Khumarawayh ibn Ahmad ibn Tulun.

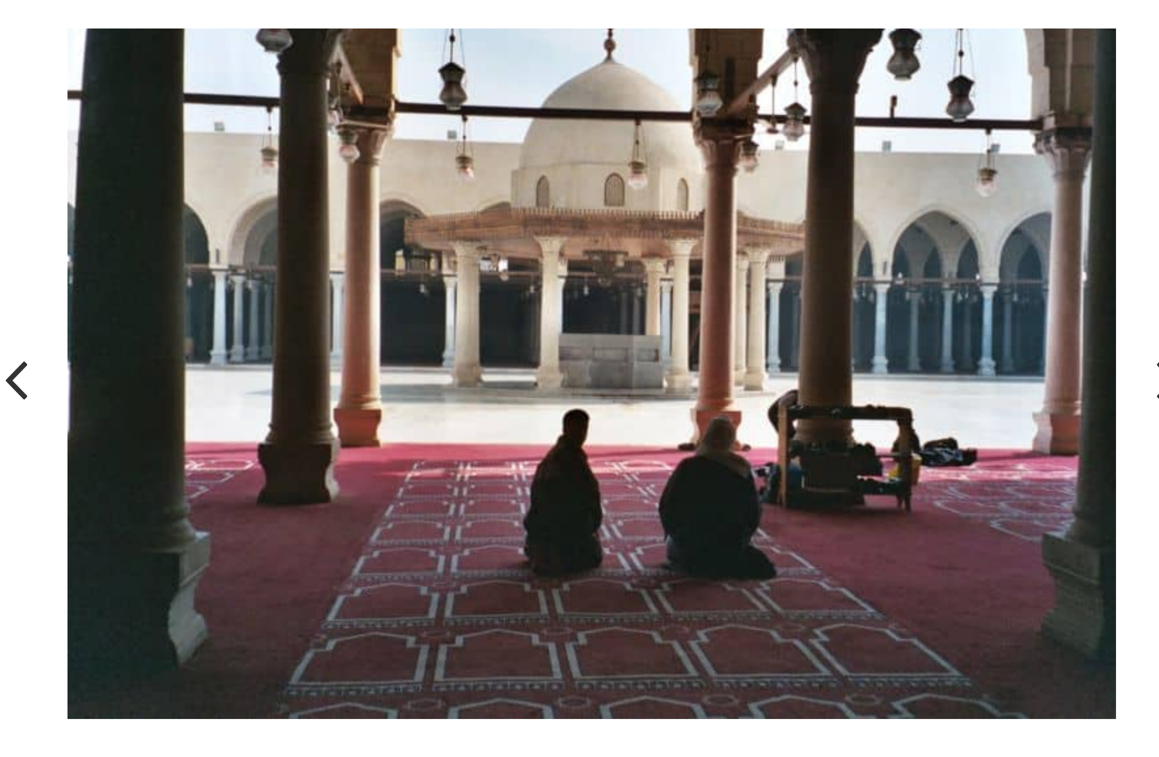
In 1167, the mosque was completely burned with Al Fustat on orders from Shawar to defend against the Crusaders. During 1171 AD, the mosque was rebuilt by the order of Sultan (ruler) Salah Al-Din (Saladin).

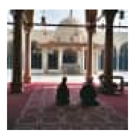
In 1228, Sultan Baibars restored parts of the prayer hall. The earthquake severely damaged the building in 1302 AD but was later restored by An-Nasir Muhammad ibn Qalawun. In 1401, another earthquake hit the mosque. These repairs, made by the Chief Traders.

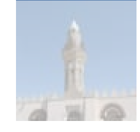
During 1796 AD, Mamluk Murad Bey ordered the rebuilding of the mosque, and at that time the builders reduced the number of rows of columns from seven to six rows and changed the direction of the passages to make it perpendicular to the wall of the qibla. During 1875 AD the mosque was rebuilt again.

In 1906, under the reign of ʿAbbās II | khedive of Egypt, the mosque was restored; these works were carried out by the Committee for the Preservation of Arab Antiquities. During the 1980s, parts of the entrance of the mosque were rebuilt.

Amr Ibn Al-Aas Mosque







Interior view of the mosque.

wikimedia.org

First Islāmic University

The Mosque of Amr Ibn Al-As was not only a place of prayer, but was an intellectual Islāmic University built 600 years before Al-Azhar, Ez-Zitouna, and Al Quaraouiyine universities where students learned all the sciences of the Arabic language and Islāmic religion. Among the most famous of those who taught the Islāmic sciences at the Mosque of Amr, Imam Al-Layth Ibn Sad the Imaam of the Egyptians, Imam Shafi'i, Ibn Hajar Al-Asqalani, Ezz Ibn Abdulsalam, and Mohammed al-Ghazali.

The Mosque of Amr Ibn Al-Aas, Cairo, Egypt

More information

The mosque of Amr Ibn Al-As can be seen in the Al Fustat district in old Cairo. It is a very crowded area where many commercial centers and it is a tourist attraction because there are many Islamic and Coptic monuments.

Amr Ibn al-As Mosque has a great place in the hearts of Egyptians. It is always full of worshipers during prayer times, especially in the month of Ramadan. In non-prayer times it is open to tourists and visitors.

Amr Ibn Al-Aas Mosque, Egypt

Sources

Egypt State Information Service (SIS)-SIS.

Behrens-Abouseif. Doris. 1989. *Islamic Architecture in Cairo*. Leiden: E. J. Brill.

External Links

More Photos of the Mosque of Amr Ibn al-As in Cairo.

Comments

Eman Abdallah Kamel (author) from Egypt on September 12, 2020:

You're right, Liza. Egypt is full of history that is worth studying and understanding. The Mosque of the Leader Amr Ibn Al-Aas, which is the oldest mosque in Egypt and Africa, occupies a special place in the hearts of Egyptians. I appreciate your visit.

Liza from USA on September 11, 2020:

Looking at this beautiful mosque, I was speechless. Eman, Egypt is definitely one of the countries that I wanted to visit one day. My husband and I would love to see the beautiful and mesmerizing architecture of Egypt. Eygpt filled with astonishing and incredible history. Thank you for sharing!

Eman Abdallah Kamel (author) from Egypt on January 17, 2019:

Thanks, Linda. Indeed the mosque of Amr Ibn Al-Aas is impressive.

Linda Chechar from Arizona on January 17, 2019:

What a beautiful and immense structure. It's had quite a lot of expansion and restoration over the centuries. Very impressive mosque.

Eman Abdallah Kamel (author) from Egypt on August 25, 2018:

Thank you very much, Louise. I appreciate your visit.

Louise Powles from Norfolk, England on August 19, 2018:

That looks such a beautiful place. I'd love to visit here. Thankyou for the photo's, it looks a stunning place.

Eman Abdallah Kamel (author) from Egypt on August 03, 2018:

Thank you very much, Afroditi. Very glad you like the article:))

Afroditi Chaida on August 03, 2018:

Very interesting article! I've visited 1-2 mosques in my life and I was really impressed. I loved your photo with 'The Mosque of Amr Ibn Al-Aas' in Ramadan.

Eman Abdallah Kamel (author) from Egypt on August 02, 2018:

Thank you very much, Kyokusiima Diana, I am really very glad because you found the article informative.

Kyokusiima Diana from Kampala-Uganda on August 02, 2018:

i have learnt something new. thanks for sharing

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